

National Cultural Policy Submission

Snuff Puppets

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

Since 1992, Snuff Puppets has been unleashing its giant puppet spectacles on millions of people worldwide. Snuff Puppets Mission: “To make art for everybody”

Our work is a collision of visual art, sculpture, design, engineering, music, movement, performance and physical theatre. At the heart of it is our giant puppets – sometimes gorgeous; sometimes grotesque – and the unpredictable ways they are brought to life. We specialise in non-traditional arts audiences, and in creatively reclaiming streets and public spaces. Snuff Puppets are deliberately anarchic, rebellious, and dangerous. We are renowned for our dramatic use of scale, from the world’s largest puppet, Everybody, to the towering, crane-operated Congolese superheroine Punch Agathe. From our home in Footscray we have taken our work to dozens of countries across five continents, from the streets of Kinshasa in the DRC to the small islands of Japan’s Seto Inland Sea, and from the Sao Paulo CBD to the forecourt of the Reichstag in Berlin. We’ve performed at countless international festivals including the London Night Parade, Sziget in Hungary, and Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Japan, as well as closer to home at the Big Day Out, and the Darwin, Melbourne, and Castlemaine State Festivals. Snuff Puppets have worked with more than 1,000 exceptional artists across a diverse range of artforms, locally, nationally, and internationally.

Snuff Puppets have reached millions of people:

- Over 2 million audiences to our performances
- With 530,000+ online subscribers
- 250 million views on our award-winning YouTube channel
- Engaged more than 3,000 community participants in artistic creation Snuff Puppets have presented a huge body of work
- Over 250 major show performances
- 800 Roaming performances
- 26 National tours across all Australian states
- 50 People’s Puppet Projects workshops around the world
- Snuff Puppets have produced 38 international tours to 26 countries including: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Denmark, Democratic Republic of the Congo, England, France, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, People’s Republic of China, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan & Thailand

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

1. First Nations	Funding for First Nations Arts We honour and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People as the traditional custodians of country. We refer to and endorse the submission from the First Nations performing arts sector: Marrugeku, Ilbjerri, Yirra Yaakin, Moogahlin, BlakDance and NAISDA.
2. A Place for Every Story	Resourcing Stories from Melbourne’s West Melbourne’s Western suburbs has one of the fastest growing populations in Australia, with 130 distinct ethnicities speaking over 150 languages. Art is vital tool to represent and celebrate the identity of those living here in the west. Art helps us to process, to understand and to share who we are.

	<p>Snuff Puppets refers to and endorses the submission from Arts West: <i>“Arts West sees opportunities to build our cultural identity by fostering the storytelling and cultural expression of communities in Melbourne’s west. To enable this, arts organisations, artists and arts infrastructure in the west must be resourced sustainably and securely to ensure that our stories can be developed, presented, and experienced by audiences”.</i></p>
<p>3. The Centrality of the Artist</p>	<p>Artists Universal basic income: regular income for artists Artists exist only when they can live above the breadline. Artists need regular income, a place to do their work and capacity to do their work. Snuff Puppets calls for research into international Universal Income models (such as Ireland) and the implementation of Australia’s own basic artist income program.</p> <p>For the following, we refer to and endorse the submission from Arts West calling for:</p> <p>“Centrelink: recognise artistic practice as professional activity <i>We call for harmonising income averaging arrangements between the ATO and Centrelink, recognising artistic practice as professional activity, and ensuring that fees or grants received will not be treated by Centrelink as income that contributes to living expenses (thus jeopardising JobSeeker payments)”</i></p> <p>“Reverse the fee increase for arts and humanities degrees <i>Communities in Melbourne’s western suburbs face significant barriers to gaining employment pathways into the creative industries, as a result of their cultural backgrounds and/or financial circumstances. The increase in university fees for arts and humanities degrees will magnify these barriers and lock a generation out of the creative industries sector. Instead, by increasing access to arts education, we foster artists, participants and audience, and in turn a thriving arts sector.”</i></p> <p>“Supporting organisations to foster creative practice <i>Alongside this, we call for investment into small to medium arts organisations who can build ongoing supportive relationships with artists through the development of their careers – from capacity building initiatives through to presentation. Melbourne’s western suburbs are home to a diverse and vibrant workforce of artists and creative workers: the 2016 census showed us cultural and creative occupations account for 3.825% of the total electorate workforce, comparable to the 3.9% national workforce average. Arts organisations in Melbourne’s west bring cultural safety, existing resources, and deep connections with local community. Investment into our organisations is an investment in the artists we work with.”</i></p> <p>“Building Pathways for Artists <i>Artist development initiatives, such as the highly successful JUMP Mentoring and Kickstarter initiatives from Australia Council for the Arts, directly support artists to build skills and capacity at a crucial ‘make or break’ stage of their early practice. We encourage the reinstatement of such initiatives.”</i></p>

<p>4. Strong Institutions and Ecosystems of all sizes, creating jobs</p>	<p>Equity for all artists Snuff Puppets calls for all artists who have been discriminated against and disenfranchised due to systematic racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia, and homophobia, to receive equity of development opportunities and funding levels.</p> <p>For the following, we refer to and endorse the submission from Arts West calling for:</p> <p>“Increase Investment in the Small to Medium Sector in Melbourne’s West <i>The creative industries in the west thrives because of its diversity of independent and small-to-medium organisations. Increased investment in this part of the sector is necessary, over and above the recent expansion of the National Performing Arts Framework.”</i></p> <p>“Provide additional support to organisations servicing growth corridors and CALD communities <i>According to the 2014 Australia Council report, Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts, “People born in a non-English speaking country are less likely to creatively participate in the arts: 38 percent, compared with 48 percent for those born in English speaking countries.” Feedback from independent artists in Melbourne’s west demonstrates that these barriers to participation have increased as a result of the pandemic. More work needs to be done to ensure the sector reflects the diversity of our population and that the organisations servicing and representing these CALD communities, particularly through Melbourne’s West growth corridor are supported through increased funding and partnership opportunities.”</i></p> <p>“Investment in sector development providers <i>Sector development providers, such as Arts West, are integral in assisting governments to achieve their goals of building a stronger arts sector. Like other peak bodies in the sector, the difficulty in securing funds compromises the efficiency and impact of our work. We urge Federal Government to address this lack of support through increased funding for our peak advisory and sector development providers.”</i></p> <p>“Investment in Cultural Infrastructure <i>The sustainability of art organisations in the west is limited by our cultural infrastructure. We need fit-for-purpose infrastructure to match the increasing demand for quality creative expression in the western suburbs.</i></p> <p><i>Significant increases in population are projected over the next 25 years, with some suburbs expected to almost double in population in that time. Small-to-medium creative organisations and independent artists have played a significant role to the liveability and increased popularity of Melbourne’s west (there are no Major Performing Arts companies or major visual art institutions in Melbourne’s west; all Arts West member organisations are housed in repurposed and underinvested buildings), with suburbs such as Footscray and Yarraville repeatedly touted by international publications as the world’s most liveable suburbs. Access to creative opportunities and cultural representation are not only key drivers to influencing a cohesive and healthy community, but also represent a sizable contribution to the economy of Melbourne’s West.”</i></p>
---	--

<p>5. Reaching the Audience</p>	<p>Equity of audience experience Snuff Puppets support a future of equitable audiences. We call for more support/investment into arts created for audiences who have been excluded due to financial circumstances, racism, accessibility, transphobia and homophobia.</p> <p>For the following, we refer to and endorse the submission from Arts West calling for:</p> <p>“Foster international relationships with our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region <i>Melbourne’s western suburbs are home to a large number of diaspora communities with existing strong cultural relationships across the Asia Pacific region. Arts West identifies opportunities to build relationships with the communities of the west as new audiences, while fostering relationships and creative exchange with the Asia Pacific regions through deep artistic exchange.”</i></p> <p>“We are held back from reaching audiences <i>Years of underinvestment by governments in small to medium art organisations has led to a lack of competitiveness in attracting and retaining highly qualified staff capable of programming, producing, delivering and promoting artistic work that reaches audiences. Underinvestment has also led to a shortfall in sophisticated systems (e.g. ticketing, audience databases) that enable us to analyse and expand our audience base.”</i></p>
--	---

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

<p>For the following, we refer to and endorse the submission from Arts West calling for:</p> <p>“Reinstate a Federal Department for the Arts <i>Visibility of the arts is vital in ensuring the Creative Industries has a voice in cross-department policy development, continuing Australia’s legacy internationally for visionary arts and cultural investment.”</i></p> <p>“Expand the Meeting of Cultural Ministers to include local government and ministers with cultural portfolios <i>The Creative Industries rely on relationships with local council for funding investment, premises rental and upgrades, permits, and planning. However, local government arts and tourism policies are often out of step with state and federal policy leading to inefficiencies. In recognising the significant and growing role of local government in arts and cultural policy and investment, we call on the government to expand the Meeting of Cultural Ministers to include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a) local government permanently.</i> <i>b) a forum with all ministers with cultural portfolios such as tourism, regional development, cities and education to ensure an integrated approach to the creative sector across government and enhancing opportunities to leverage the creative sector’s power in Australia’s cultural life.”</i>

“Australia Council for the Arts: Increased Investment

Arts West calls on the Federal Government to double the Australia Council’s budget to ensure Australia’s arts funding and advisory body is best placed to develop impactful programs driving recovery. A properly resourced Australia Council for the Arts is vital to ensuring the continued economic and non-economic benefits of the arts to Australia and guaranteeing a sector recovery following the devastating impact of COVID19. Since 2014, Australia Council for the Arts has been subject to creeping austerity measures, which has seen a decline in Australia Council’s funding in real terms by nearly 20%. As a result, Federal Government arts funding has become inequitably competitive with small to medium organisations and independent artists (who can only access two-fifths of the funding available; Major Performing Arts organisations take up the majority) increasingly being defunded or unable to access support.”

“Australia Council for the Arts: The Importance of Arms-Length Distribution of Funding Arts West supports an arms-length model to the distribution of federal arts funding. Australia Council for the Arts has the sector’s confidence in its rigorous and transparent peer-assessment processes. Like many of our peers, we are concerned that funding channelled through the Office for the Arts will continue to disadvantage small to medium organisations and independents artists across the sector and particularly in Melbourne’s western suburbs.”